

SYSTEM FOR MERCHANDISING AND THE EVALUATION OF RESPONSES TO BROADCAST TRANSMISSIONS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This application is a continuation-in-part of copending application Ser. No. 837,827 filed Mar. 10, 1986, now U.S. Pat. No. 4,745,468.

This invention relates to transmission by broadcast media including radio and television broadcasting programs for offering merchandise and services to listeners and viewers of the programs and relates, more particularly, to the transmission of signals to listening and viewing members of a remote shopping audience designating questions or tasks, to response criteria for evaluating responses of the listeners and viewers of the broadcast programs, and to the dispensing of awards to individual listeners and viewers having provided answers meeting the response criteria. More specifically, the present invention relates to television broadcasts providing home shopping services to members of the audience.

In recent years, a growing number of television stations have carried programs in which many kinds of merchandise and services are offered to television viewers. Merchandise is displayed and offered, and services are explained and offered, via television. Members of the viewing audience may place orders at the price at which the items of merchandise or services are offered. Most of these orders are placed by telephone, and are paid for by having the price charged to a credit card identified over the telephone, or by personal check.

There is a drawback to the home shopping services currently offered on television in that the viewing audience tires after watching such a program for a protracted period of time. Such is the case particularly if the program is devoid of excitement or items of interest. In such a situation, the television station is likely to lose viewers. The hosts of some home shopping services encourage viewers to telephone, and thus participate in the show. This effort to generate shopping interest, however, has not proven to be very effective.

Another common form of program transmitted by the broadcast media is the quiz program. Typically, in such a program, a panel of people provide answers to questions arising from the subject matter of the quiz. Often, the answers are indicated by use of a keyboard with electronic circuitry. The answers may be provided in response to questions which are asked directly, or in response to a situation or task presented by the program such as in the solving of a puzzle.

A characteristic of such quiz programs is the fact that the responses to the questions are limited to participants in the studio audience. The much larger external audience, namely the listeners of radio and viewers of television, are generally excluded from participation except for those few people who, on occasion, may have the opportunity to call in a response via telephone to a situation arising in the program. Letter writing has also been employed as a means of response to questions and other matters raised by the program.

Thus, it is apparent that a problem exists in that the larger external or remote audience is essentially excluded from active participation in the broadcast programs. In view of the fact that the studio audiences can provide their responses electronically, it is clear that personal involvement, such as conversation among par-

ticipants, is not necessarily required. It is, therefore, apparent that such programs should be open to participation to the larger external audience in addition to the studio audience; yet, no system providing for such participation has been available.

It is noted that this problem is not limited to quiz programs only, but that other forms of programs might also be conducted in a fashion allowing active public participation if a suitable system were available to make such public participation possible. A desirable feature of such a system would be the capability for evaluating and recording the responses, a feature that would be most useful, for example, in the case of market research because such a feature would permit surveying much larger population sample than is presently achieved. However, in spite of the advantages which would be provided by such a system, for including the listening and viewing audience, no such system has yet been available.

Of particular interest herein is the use of such audience-participation programs for merchandising goods and services to television viewers. A television program presents an excellent opportunity for describing the goods and services to the audience. Such a presentation can be an enjoyable experience and elicit favorable responses from members of the audience when the presentation of the goods and services is offered in conjunction with a program, such as a quiz program, which invites audience participation.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The foregoing problem is overcome, and other advantages are provided by a system for merchandising and the evaluation of response to broadcast programs which, in accordance with the invention, provides for the transmission of signals designating questions and response criteria along with transmission of the broadcast program including a presentation of goods and services which are thereby offered for sale.

The invention includes both method and system aspects which create added interest and excitement among viewers, and thus tend to increase watching of the television stations carrying programs of the type to be described hereinafter. Also, those viewers who watch the programs incorporating the invention are likely to place more orders than heretofore, and for higher-priced items.

It is therefore a principal object of the present invention to increase the number of viewers tuning into television home-shopping programs by making such programs more interesting.

It is another object of the invention to induce audiences to place larger numbers of orders for a given size of audience, such as per thousand viewers.

Yet another object of the invention is to create inducements to television viewers to become buyers by presenting an award to each respondent who meets a predetermined response criteria. For example, an award may be cash, a cash discount, a credit, or allowance applicable against the price of merchandise offered for sale by the home shopping service. Also, an award may be in the form of an accessory of the merchandise or a separate item which may also be displayed with the merchandise offered for sale. Such bonus item awarded to a successful contestant is normally delivered to such shopper along with the purchased merchandise. Such premiums or bonus items constitute a secondary but